

The Cow S**t Leg

Early on Sunday 11th December there was an explosion and subsequent fire at the Buncefield oil depot down south. This had triggered a reaction in some people to panic buy petrol! Coincidentally, my racing partner Sue's fire-fighter husband had been called out that morning to extinguish a fire in a local Bombay mix factory. Unfortunately, he missed his leg of the Calderdale relay and by now it was lunchtime and Hebden Bridge was bustling with Christmas Shoppers. " They must be stocking up on Bombay mix in case there's a shortage!" laughed Sue.

It was my first time at this prestigious event and the pre-race atmosphere at Wainstalls was exciting. A few A-team runners surged up the Hill, where we were gathered bracing ourselves against the chilly December wind, and handed over the baton to their expectant team-mates.

Once the mass start had been called and the race was underway it wasn't long before we had to stop to queue at a style, which was a feature of the initial stages of the race that we had been warned about. We were soon over the style and suddenly Rhys and Mick, stormed passed us, eliminating us from their slipstream, apparently having just missed the mass start.

We marched up muddy banks, clambered over stone walls and trampled through somebody's back garden, avoiding the washing, (a testimony to the fine December weather). As we crossed over a road, my thoughts turned to my new fell shoes, I wondered whether the road would blunt the studs, as it would have blunted my cross country running spikes, I ran in now over fifteen years ago.

Halfway into the race, we were joined by Phil and Kath's husband. The idea was that as both Sue and I hadn't had time to reeky the leg; they were both to act as guides. The advantage of having the men there was that we effectively had human GPS sat - trackers to tell us where to turn and what to expect from the course. Phil commented on the extent of the mud, exclaiming that the course was "the cow shit leg!" I have the utmost admiration for these two men who had already run one race.

If there was one dramatic moment in the race, it was when Sue pursued a woman who had broken off from following the pack; she gestured to me to follow. " But they are all following the path," I said pathetically alarmed at this display on non-conformity. Rival runners were being slowed down due to the slippery surface of the path. Luckily we overtook those queuing to walk over a narrow bridge, as we fell down the bramble-strewn bank into the icy cold stream grazing face and ankle respectively.

During the closing stages of the race we were back on the road surface, when finally I saw two Todmorden Harriers' vests, stood randomly side by side, like a comedy duo, Mick and Rhys who had already finished. "Two hundred metres to the finish!" they shouted. Sue and I crossed the finish line in less than one hour twenty minutes and were eventually joined by other members of our team who warmly greeted us all. It had been a good race.

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